

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	13/12/2016
Unique reference number	SC472139
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Amegreen Children's Services Limited
Registered provider address	2 Granary Court, Fair Oak Green, Stratfield Saye, Reading RG7 2DL

Responsible individual	Gary Carlin
Registered manager	Adam Law
Inspector	Chris Peel

Inspection date	13/12/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC472139

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- This remains a very settled home in which young people are making good progress in most areas of development, especially in managing their emotions and improving their engagement with education.
- Very few incidents of disruptive behaviour occur. Young people do not require physical interventions and rarely have sanctions imposed. Staff are impressively consistent in their approach so that expectations of behaviour are clear.
- Young people who have been at the home for some time have demonstrated a remarkable reduction in problematic behaviours. They have been able to embark on new areas of development, including (for one young person) a return home, as a result.
- The manager and staff make excellent links with education professionals, both in schools and local authorities, helping children to access and benefit from the best available provision. Young people have admirable attendance compared to their previous records and are meeting expectations of their academic progress.
- Young people have made great progress in being able to communicate with adults; for one this has been a rapid improvement, for another it has been nurtured over a significant period. Young people are confident in expressing their wishes and feelings, whether to staff or other professionals.
- One worker from outside the home said that one young person did not use to be able to tolerate being with others for more than 45 minutes but will now talk for hours.
- Staff encourage young people to undertake self-care tasks and understand what their bodies need to keep healthy and well. Tact and skill are used to help young people have appropriate choices over diet and personal care regimes while also ensuring that their well-being is not compromised.
- The manager and staff persevere with establishing caring relationships with young people when this is resisted. They work creatively to find ways of communicating advice and guidance so that, as far as possible, young people see this as demonstrating their concern rather than merely interfering. The young people are therefore more likely to take heed and act on it.
- Young people like the atmosphere of the home. Parents and professionals feel that the accommodation is homely and staff are welcoming. One professional commented: 'It doesn't feel like a residential home at all.'

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person(s) meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Monitoring and surveillance should be no more intrusive than necessary, having regard to the child's need for privacy, and therefore should be regularly reviewed. (Regulation 24(1)(d))	15/02/2017
The registered person must ensure that at all times at least one person on duty at the home has a suitable first aid qualification. (Regulation 31(1)(a))	15/02/2017
The registered person must maintain case records for each child which are kept up to date, specifically on key-work sessions, behaviour management plans and risk assessments. (Regulation 36(1)(b))	15/02/2017
The registered person must ensure that the independent person carrying out visits to the home only inspects a child's case records if the child and the child's placing authority consent. (Regulation 44(2)(b))	15/02/2017

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Any home using monitoring equipment should have a written policy describing how this will support the safeguarding and well-being of those living and working in the home in accordance with regulation 24. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 16, paragraph 3.16)
- Children should be able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon; in particular actions agreed in key-work sessions should be reported back to children and recorded. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.11)
- Each child should have the permission for staff to administer first aid and non-prescription medication given by a person with parental responsibility for them recorded in their relevant plan. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations

including the quality standards', page 35 paragraph 7.14)

- Staff should understand the system for rewarding and celebrating positive behaviour and recognising when children have managed situations well. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 46, paragraph 9.39) This system should be used consistently.
- The registered person should have a workforce plan which can fulfil the workforce-related requirements of regulation. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 53, paragraph 10.8)
- The registered person should only accept placements for children when they are satisfied that the home can respond effectively to the child's assessed needs as recorded in the child's relevant plans and when they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4) The impact risk assessment should be adequately recorded.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This privately owned service accommodates up to two children or young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are three other homes run by the same provider in the local area.

The home uses 'Systems-Centered' methods of working with children and young people who have experienced developmental trauma. It has access to equine therapy with the organisation's own horses.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/01/2016	Full	Good
02/09/2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
26/03/2015	Full	Good
14/01/2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The home is located in a rural setting, some distance from main population centres but within walking distance of local shops and other amenities. There are only two placements, and therefore a small group of staff caring for the young people. The quietness and relative isolation is conducive to children and young people finding this a place where they can step back from influences that they have found difficult to manage and use the opportunity to develop greater strengths in areas such as education and regulating their feelings and behaviour. The setting does, however, present challenges in terms of helping young people to learn independence skills and to socialise with peers. Staff use a 'town training' programme to address the former issue, assisting young people to use public transport and be responsible for themselves in the wider community. Staff have been encouraging young people to increase social networks through participation in clubs; although they have introduced one young person to some activities in the community, this has not continued. Staff have been cautiously exploring opportunities to cultivate friendships and helping young people to understand how to sustain them, but socialisation remains an area that has not developed to a significant degree. Interactions with staff are much more positive. One professional described how even though a particular young person: 'is distrustful of others, over time they have been encouraged to express their views and opinions, to express ideas about what the future might look like and to justify them'. Another said that a young person's growth in confidence was 'phenomenal' and that the young person was 'making unbelievable strides in his emotional development'. Young people take opportunities to make their wishes and feelings known. A complaint made by one was handled well and resolved quickly, to the satisfaction of the young person. This is leading to young people being more open to new experiences that they would previously have declined. This includes education. Attendance is excellent, considering the fact that one young person had not had any formal education for 12 years before coming to the home. Staff have been pro-active in working with the placing authority's virtual school, identifying a suitable college course, and making introductions. The manager admits young people to the home sensitively, having regard to their circumstances and personal preferences. He has ensured that staff are equipped	

with the knowledge and understanding required to welcome and work with each young person.

Staff assist young people to gain the skills needed to look after themselves independently in the future, including preparing food, keeping their own rooms clean and tidy and managing money. There is an expectation that chores, particularly around meal times, will be undertaken. In this way, young people contribute to the life of the home and develop an understanding that this is part of living together. Opportunities to earn extra pocket money by doing additional jobs are also available to reward such efforts. This helps young people to see themselves not as passively receiving care but as growing in maturity as individuals. To further this, staff gently encourage young people to widen their interests from ones they enjoyed as children to those appropriate for teenagers.

Staff rarely use sanctions to curb undesirable behaviour, as young people present as settled and respond well to explanations about what is acceptable. As conduct is largely very good, staff less frequently recognise it through the home's reward system, despite reminders by the manager.

Contact with family members is supported well, as staff understand the importance of maintaining important relationships, even if they have been problematic. Professionals appreciate the role that staff take in facilitating visits by parents and supervising contact when required. On one occasion, disagreement between a member of staff and a parent threatened the success of a contact session. This was recognised at the time and addressed by the worker being replaced on the day and not supervising on subsequent occasions.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The manager and staff keep young people very safe. The high level of supervision and helpful relationships that young people have with those who care for them have contributed to there being no episodes of a young person going missing or requiring a physical intervention since the last inspection. Risky behaviour previously demonstrated by one young person has not recurred for many months and there has been some good work undertaken to help him to understand appropriate relationships with peers. Staff persist in developing positive relationships with young people even though not all young people are keen to reciprocate, finding it hard to trust carers. Nevertheless, young people report feeling safe and professionals believe that staff are managing potential risks very well. Staff are consistent in the messages that	

they give young people about expectations of behaviour and routines. Young people accept these boundaries, even if reluctantly, and this establishes a secure base from which they can then make progress.

Staff encourage young people to undertake self-care tasks and understand what their bodies need to keep healthy and well. Personal preferences and moral decisions over what it is appropriate to eat are respected. Staff tactfully give guidance and advice to inform young people's choices regarding their diet and personal care regimes, while also ensuring that their well-being is not compromised.

The home's storage and administration of medication is safe. There are not always two staff members available, so that one can administer controlled drugs and another witness, but, when another staff member comes on shift, they check totals to ensure that the correct amount is present. The earliest opportunity, therefore, is taken to identify any potential errors – of which there have been none since the last inspection.

Positive handling plans are in place for each young person, so that staff know the most appropriate ways to assist young people to behave well and to divert them if it seems that they are becoming unsettled. Some pre-populated options for techniques (such as humour or ignoring behaviour) are not checked to indicate whether they should be used or avoided. This could lead to confusion for any staff not used to working with the young person.

Documentation does not always reflect what is known about current risks, including impact risk assessments drawn up for newly referred young people. Despite the manager articulating the potential of a negative effect on an existing resident that could have arisen following the proposed admission, this was not present in the assessment. A behaviour identified as being a medium-to-high risk in a separate assessment was also absent. As a result, no plan to ameliorate the potential impact of either was drawn up.

Managers have allowed the first aid training for two staff members to lapse, meaning that, for some shifts, particularly sleep-ins, there has been no one working who has a current first aid certificate. This has not resulted in any harm to a young person. It is coupled, though, with consent forms for first aid either not being on case files or being undated.

Other safeguarding training is comprehensive. Mandatory training covers child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, and courses have also been undertaken in female genital mutilation and self-harm. This increases the staff's ability to safeguard those in their care.

Although no child has gone missing from the home in a very long time, the provider has reviewed the policy. It now refers to the need to request return-to-care interviews, and there are arrangements in place for these to be undertaken by

managers independent of the home if the placing authority is not able to respond quickly enough.

Health and safety monitoring is strong. Monthly checks occasionally pick up minor issues, which are dealt with very quickly. Fire safety practice is also robust, with frequent evacuation drills and checks on equipment that are never missed.

Despite the rural setting, the home is situated on a busy road that has only a narrow path for pedestrians. However, staff and young people are well aware of the dangers, and there are local paths that they can use to avoid the road entirely. This is covered in the home's comprehensive location review.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
Young people and staff speak well of the manager. Although stretched by responsibilities across the two homes for which he is the registered manager, he is regarded as available, understanding and supportive. The manager will often fill-in on shifts, including sleep-ins. The roles of deputy manager and team leader also cover both homes, rather than concentrating on one or the other. All three have either obtained a level 5 qualification (in the case of the deputy) or are undertaking it. All other permanent or sessional residential staff who continue to work at the home have now obtained a relevant level 3 qualification. The manager champions the therapeutic model adopted by the provider and helps staff to weave it into their practice. Members of staff could, to varying degrees, explain how they aim to work from an objective stance. Some struggle to modify long-standing methods of work developed over many years' experience or to avoid personal reactions, particularly under stress. Regular training and consultation in the 'Systems-Centered' approach is valued. The manager is aware of the strengths of the home and the areas that need improvement. He has put strategies in place to address the weaknesses identified in previous inspections, but these have not been universally effective in achieving the progress hoped for. Indeed, some matters that were the subject of requirements and recommendations going back before the most recent inspection have become issues again. The standard of recording of key-worker sessions has improved. However, there is some confusion about what constitutes a key-work session, especially as young	

people may not engage in a formal meeting. There is no format available in which to record significant conversations that will be put on case files other than for key worker sessions. This means that a considerable amount of important work, including that done to fulfil actions arising from statutory reviews, is not captured. The key worker did not sign the majority of session records and there is no evidence that they share them with young people. As stated in previous reports, those sessions that are recorded do not clearly identify actions and are not signed by the young person concerned. Guidance for staff does not indicate the provider's minimum requirements regarding recording sessions.

The manager has introduced case file monitoring forms, but these have not improved the timeliness of staff reviewing plans and assessments; some seen to be out of date at the interim inspection remained so at this one. There is also no process for staff to record when they have read new versions. Taken together, these deficiencies mean that staff are not able to use written plans and assessments to inform the work that they do with young people.

The requirement to review the need for door alarms on a regular basis has been reinstated. One review undertaken some months ago did not reflect significant changes in circumstances. Another, concluding that an alarm was not required, has not been implemented as, unbeknown to the manager, staff are unfamiliar with how to turn off one alarm rather than the whole system. Staff have been risk averse about this which risks institutionalising children and giving them the message that they cannot be trusted, even when their behaviour is safe. There is no guidance for staff on assessing the need for surveillance on the organisation's electronically held policy and procedures.

Staff have not sought the consent of one young person's placing authority for the independent person undertaking regulation 44 visits to read case files.

The home's workforce plan does not adequately detail the process for managing and improving poor performance beyond the provision of day-to-day support and supervision, although meetings with the organisation's human resources manager have been used in the past. Timescales for sessional or agency staff who are not working full time are not specified.

The home's development plan concentrates almost exclusively on issues that have been addressed or on current expectations of practice. The manager pays too little attention to strategic aims for improving the service.

Despite these shortcomings and lack of progress with long-standing issues, the manager continues to run a home that helps young people to progress and benefit from the care offered by staff who are motivated to meet their needs.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or that result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

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